

A decorative border with intricate floral and scrollwork patterns, rendered in a dark gray color, framing the central text.

**(still losers) after
all this time**

werepope (quiteparadise)

(still losers) after all this time by werepope (quiteparadise)

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three canons simultaneously

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Summary:

Eddie forgot some things. He chose not to remember others.

(still losers) after all this time

Author's Note:

A slapdash combination of the novel, the mini-series, and the movie.

Minor, non-explicit reference to a canonical, consensual underage sex act. See end notes for brief details.

It's not as if Eddie forgot about Richie Tozier. He's seen him on television, for Christ's sake, doing standup on Leno and Conan, there was even that annoying car commercial that aired for a while, before commercials became something you could fast-forward and ad-block out of existence. It would be impossible to forget Richie, but seeing him standing in the dining room of a Chinese restaurant still feels like being slapped awake.

He's still Richie: on all the time, not great at reading moods or levels of appropriateness, but willing to take the slings and arrows that come with bad taste. It's been a long time — they're on the last stretch to forty now — but it doesn't feel like that long ago. It feels like a decade, tops, feels impossible that they've managed to spend more than half their lives without so much as a postcard exchange. It's been almost thirty years, but Richie calls him "Eds" and wraps him up onto an over-enthusiastic hug, and Eddie feels like he's right back in high school, swears he can smell the miasma of Calvin Klein One still clinging to Richie's collar.

Richie makes the rounds, smacks Bill on the back too hard, kisses Bev on the cheek, kisses Mike on the mouth, threatens to do the same to Stan, accosts Ben until he proves his identity by showing off the scar on his stomach, and winds up back by Eddie, slinging an arm around him. This feels overly familiar, too. Richie hit a growth spurt at fourteen and didn't stop until senior year. Eddie eked out a measly five inches, putting him at the perfect height to be tucked demeaningly into Richie's armpit and noogied. There's no hair-ruffling yet, but it's only a matter of time.

It's impossible that he forgot Richie Tozier, but he forgot a lot of things. They all did. It comes back to them in waves and they take turns in the telling, filling in the gaps until they can almost recall that whole horrible summer, or at least enough that it doesn't feel like there are black holes in their memories anymore, just shadows here and there, where the most gruesome bits go.

Catching up is easier, goes smoother. They laugh more, offer more. Mike's a librarian, Ben is an architect, Bevvie designs clothes, Bill writes novels, Stan's an accountant — Richie makes an off-color joke that everyone was already braced to yell at him for — that's what he does now, surprise surprise. Bill and Stan are wearing wedding rings and are eager to pull out their phones to show off pictures of their wives, selfies from the beach and the tennis court, competing a little, grinning. Their wives are beautiful, smiling, happy in all the photos.

"What about you, Eddie?" Mike asks. They're seated near each other, Bev in between them at the overcrowded table. It's warm, reassuring to knock elbows and ankles, to settle into each other.

Eddie lies. He took his wedding ring off on the train, slipped it into his suitcase, too sick with dread to have room for the usual self-loathing. Twenty-seven years ago, he didn't have anything to hide from these people, but there are things he can't bring himself to admit now: he married a woman so much like his mother it's laughable, but not at all funny. Myra looks like Eddie's mom, is domineering like her, overbearing in her worry. He doesn't have charming photos of her. He doesn't want to look at her even when she's near.

"I'm seeing someone," he says. "Off and on. More off."

Mike's sympathetic but not curious. He wears the expression of a man who knows that feeling too well, who knows better than to press. His smile is sweet, kind, so very Mike that Eddie wants to get up and hug him, just for the sake of it.

"Sometimes it feels like we gave something up," Mike says, quieter. "That we paid a price for beating It."

Eddie's breath drags too thinly through his throat.

Richie gives a bark of a laugh, unamused. "You're kidding. Most people would say we hit the jackpot, statistically. Back me up, Stan."

"Fuck off," Stan replies, automatic, barely glancing up from his phone, from his slideshow of golf courses and plantation houses.

"What? Look at us, man. How many people in this room are worth over a million dollars? That ain't bad, for a bunch of kids from Derry."

Mike's persistent though. He leans into it, braces an elbow on the table and gesticulates with the flat of his hand, authoritative. "And how many times have you been married?"

Richie's laugh is brighter this time but still short, hard. "Three. But one of those doesn't count."

"How," Bev asks, wide-eyed, taking the bait, "does a marriage 'not count'? You're so full of shit, Richie Tozier."

Richie comes up out of his seat to refill her wine glass, tops off Eddie's before he sits back again, and launches into a ridiculous story about getting married in Greece and then trying to get it annulled in the States, only to have to fly back to Greece and have his maybe-possibly-wife contest the whole thing, or so he thinks. He's never understood a word of Greek.

It's too good for too long. The night goes to shit in ten seconds flat, in the form of complementary fortune cookies.

Eddie didn't want to forget a lot of the stuff that happened in Derry when they were kids, but he was okay not remembering the smell of blood, the nausea of sudden and abject fear, the feeling that he was going to shake himself apart.

They hustle each other out, already back in the habit of moving in a pack. Funny just how much they could forget without even realizing it, but muscle memory and bone-deep terror are good stimulants, better than conversation. Eddie grabs hold of Mike and Richie grips his arm, hard, until they're outside, in the fluorescent flare of the streetlights, and they have to disperse to get the hell away from the

latest horror.

Eddie remembers when riding a bike felt like danger embodied, how much he'd had to beg to get his mother to buy him his bicycle, how careful he'd promised to be, how scary it felt to win a losing fight with gravity, at least for as long as he had momentum on his side. After that, the bike felt like freedom. The losers club could go from one end of Derry to the other, make it back home in time for dinner, tired but accomplished. By the time kids started disappearing, by the time they started facing their fears in the most horrible, literal way possible, the bike didn't feel quite as safe anymore. He was too aware of how exposed he was, how easy it would be to steer into a pothole and fall right into the mouth of the beast. He hadn't really appreciated how much of a flock the bikes made them, until right now, standing in a parking lot and figuring out who drove what.

Eddie digs his nails into his palms until that pain becomes more immediately important than how hard it is to breathe, and the white noise of a panic attack fades into the background enough to hear Richie, still standing close, holding onto his arm again, saying:

"C'mon, Eds, don't pass out now. You haven't even seen me drive it yet."

Richie has a sports car, of all things. There's no way he found someone to rent him one in Bangor, or Portland for that matter. He must have driven up from Boston. He would, too. Richie was always that kind of asshole. Never waste an opportunity to be the loudest person in a room. Why get a midsize sedan when he could push the speedometer in a Porsche and turn an almost-four hour drive into an easy three?

"Do you even know how to drive stick?" Eddie asks, lungs barely shaking on the inhale, and Richie opens the door for him.

"Baby," he says, "I've had plenty of experience with stick."

Eddie makes a show of snugging the seatbelt into place stranglingly tight, but Richie isn't any more of a reckless driver than he's used to from daily life. Better, maybe, if only because this is Derry, and the traffic here is non-existent. Richie still relishes the opportunity to

shift from third to fourth, flexing his fingers on the gearshift and all but leering.

The ride to the hotel takes twenty minutes but it feels like ages, like the indeterminate time between one chapter and the next, like going into hyperdrive. Plenty of time in which to unspool, to breathe into, to drop his head back against the seat and not reminisce at all, just listen to Richie's shitty Spotify playlist of music he's too old to listen to.

Mike's rented them every room at a picturesque inn that used to be just an ostentatious house that no one in town could afford to renovate. Eddie's stayed in better. Hell, Eddie owns better, and there's no way that Porsche-renting Richie stays in hotels with less than four stars when he travels, but it's nice. It feels good, both like Derry and distinctly separate from Derry as it was back then. They both take a moment to just look around, feeling it out.

The rooms are all on the second floor, around a single straight hallway, everyone in hearing range, but they still end up clumped up together for a while in Ben's room, reluctant to stray out of sight. The adrenaline spike of fear has worn down to just a tired ache, tension between Eddie's shoulders, a tremble in his hands he can't work out. Even Richie is visibly exhausted, wilting with it, slumped into an armchair, eyes focused somewhere midair.

Mike caves first. He presses a hand to the wall to steady himself as he climbs to his feet, squeezes Bill's shoulder when he says goodnight. Eddie puts on a modicum of a smile when he excuses himself, all the effort he can manage. He's not surprised when Richie gets up too.

He didn't forget Richie, it would take something a lot stronger than It to knock a personality that big out of his head, but he forgot a lot of things. Forgot the shape of Richie's eyes without the distortion of his coke bottle glasses. Forgot how smart he was under all that ego, how observant he could be, how righteously brave. When Richie stands in his doorway, leaning against the jamb and watching him dig the toiletry bag out of his suitcase, Eddie could almost cringe back from all the memories, or from the big blank spot where they hadn't been for so long.

“You’re hovering,” Eddie says, too tired to put any heat in it, too worn down.

Richie shrugs, pushes off the doorframe and steps in far enough to close the door behind him, but keeps his fingertips on the handle, like an anchor. “I’m deciding.”

“Well make up your mind, because I’m going to bed.”

Not sleeping. No way he’s sleeping tonight, not without an antihistamine, and that seems like a pretty stupid idea, all things considered.

Richie nods. He taps his fingertips on the door. Smirks. “I almost forgot how annoying you are.”

Eddie smirks right back at him. “Funny. I was going to say the same thing.”

“No you weren’t,” Richie says, and backs out the door to get his suitcase. He’s gone for thirty, forty seconds, just long enough for Eddie to get to the shared bathroom. He brushes his teeth with the door open, listens to everyone else move around their own rooms, the creak of old floorboards, the murmur of quiet conversations, Ben’s muted laughter.

When he gets back to the room, Richie is already in his pajamas: blue cotton sleep pants and a t-shirt with the In-N-Out logo on it. The bed’s turned down, but he hasn’t claimed a side, shrugs when Eddie asks if he has a preference.

“Whatever you want,” he says, stepping around Eddie for his own turn in the bathroom.

Eddie didn’t forget Richie, but he let himself forget a couple things.

The thing they never talk about, in capital letters, the thing that made Eddie feel like he was so far in his body he could slip out the other side of himself and into Bev, into all of them — the day he still doesn’t think about ever — when Eddie was still reeling, lightheaded, Richie cupped his cheeks in sweat-damp palms and kissed him, slow and wet and so deep it felt like he was trying to taste Eddie’s tonsils.

It wasn't any more or less spectacular than anything else that happened that day, and they never talked about it either.

Richie turns off the overhead light when he comes back. He smells more like toothpaste and less like aftershave now, and for a moment the quiet, the shift of the mattress under his weight, the sound of his breathing is so intimate that Eddie wants to tell him to get the hell out after all, but then Richie groans and drops heavily onto his back and complains about Eddie being "the littlest spoon" and the tension of everything that did and didn't happen when they were kids is gone, obliterated.

"Spoon me," Eddie warns, "and I'll elbow you in the face."

Richie folds his hands over his stomach, an innocent lamb, motionless and impervious to Eddie's glare as he flips the bedside light off. Once he's settled onto the mattress he feels frozen there, like any small movement is going to disturb Richie or, worse, give his discomfort away. Eddie's been married for the better part of a decade, he shouldn't feel like a fly under glass, but he and Myra have their own rooms. They'd sleep on different floors if they could. He doesn't know how to do this, or even to appear as if he does, except to stay as still as possible and count his breaths.

Richie has been married and divorced, married and divorced, married and divorced. He must be an old hand at this by now. Not just the sleeping arrangement, but the awkwardness of it, the strained heaviness of silence between them while they can still hear the others through the half-open door.

Eddie loses count before Richie shifts, rolling over onto his side, knee nudging up against Eddie's. He doesn't whisper, exactly, but his voice is quiet when he asks: "The person you're seeing, how off is it?"

There's no good answer that's also honest, and Eddie is tempted to pretend he didn't hear him at all, but Richie feels for him under the weight of the covers, finds his elbow, his forearm, his wrist, until he can get his fingertips into Eddie's palm. He rubs his thumb over the bare skin where Eddie's wedding ring should be.

It takes three breaths before he can trust himself to speak. "It's

complicated.”

“Complicated is a Facebook status, Eds.”

“Don’t—”

“Yeah, I know.” Richie tips his head down on his pillow like he can see through the blanket to where he’s touching Eddie still, tracing the spur of his knuckle.

“You’re one to talk,” Eddie says, willing himself not to turn his head, not to squint out Richie’s features in the half-dark. “Three divorces? Really?”

Richie smiles. Eddie can hear it. “Two and an annulment. I told you.”

“That’s still a lot.”

“The first one was pretty good,” Richie says, twisting his hips to settle further into the mattress, into Eddie’s space. “Too good, maybe, or I’m just too much of a fuck-up. I cheated on her.”

Eddie doesn’t reel back from him, he’s boneless and comfortable and so very tired, but he doesn’t have to put much effort into sounding as disappointed as he is. “Jesus. That’s—”

“To be fair, I did tell her. I know how shitty it was.”

“Do you also know that doesn’t make it better? That’s not less shitty. That’s just compounded shit.”

Richie could cast some slings of his own now, has never held back from them for as long as Eddie has known him, but he just shrugs one shoulder. He’s had time to accept it.

“What about the third one?” Eddie asks, when he can’t lay in the silence anymore with the whorls of Richie’s fingerprints on his skin.

“Less good. Shorter. We were okay for a while, but I was busy a lot, and then when we saw each other we were always arguing, trying to stir shit up. Taking it out on each other, you know? I threw a phone, she threw a vase. We both have crap aim, but it was past time.” He

rubs his cheek against the pillow, a scrape of stubble, and exhales a rush over Eddie's shoulder. "Technically, we're still married."

Eddie can't not look at him anymore. He has to crane back to do it, to keep from getting a mouthful of Richie's hair while he tries to read his expression, read the moment, read anything other than the staccato of his own thumping heart.

Richie watches him from under his lashes, and Eddie remembers the day he left Derry for California, a week after their high school graduation. Richie was sitting in one of the molded plastic chairs in the Greyhound station, his overstuffed backpack hefted up into the seat beside him. Eddie stood between Richie's knees. He wasn't transcendent then, nothing had been irrevocably changed about him that day, but he leaned down over Richie's upturned face and kissed him.

He remembers how big Richie's hands had felt, big palms spread on his waist, fingertips caught in his shirt. Remembers that it seemed to go on forever, until the man at the ticket counter cleared his throat too loudly not to be pointed, and that Richie held onto him for a while after, like maybe he wasn't as ready to leave as Eddie had thought he was.

Eddie doesn't have the nerve to kiss him now, not even with the threat of It hanging over them, but Richie drops his hand to wedge in even closer and Eddie lets him, carding his fingers into Richie's curls.

"When this is over," Richie says, "you should come out to LA for a while. I know a good divorce lawyer."

Author's Note:

Stephen King's novel *It* features consensual underage sex between The Losers Club. There are no explicit references in this story to the sex act in particular. If you squint you can probably infer it. I tried to be respectful, given the nature of the scene, but I'm firmly in the "wtf stephen king how did that make the final edit" camp.